

A Common Core Lesson

by Lynne Belluscio

Our first school groups came to LeRoy House Monday. Two classes of kindergarteners arrived after lunch and two will participate tomorrow and two on Wednesday. The kindergarten program is called "A is for Apple." We bring out the apple peeler and the small cider press. McPherson Orchards are kind enough to give us some apples for the kids to peel and then press into cider.

At another table, under the supervision of Mrs. Furr, the kids have the opportunity to try apple jelly, apple butter, dried apples, apple crisps, Apple Jacks, apple cider, and apple juice. The third table has small dishes with apples and cloves. The students push the cloves into the apples to make pomanders, that smell so good.

While the kids were taking turns using the apple peeler, I asked them what the middle of the apple was called - - the part with the seeds - - the part that you don't eat. "It's the core." One of the kids answered. "Well, I said to the teacher, I guess we've found the common core of this lesson!"

This year, we're starting the lesson by reading a book by Helen Kay, "Apple Pie For Lewis." I love this book because it tells the whole story about how the apple trees grow, blossom, and produce apples. Lewis has to wait patiently until he can pick the apples that his grandmother will use to make his pie. And oh what a delicious pie! I have to remember when I read the story to leave out the part about using wood to heat the stove. And no one has ever heard of an icebox. But the story was written in 1951 when a wood stove and an icebox were still in my grandmother's kitchen.

A couple of years ago, I wrote about this book. The copy that I use was originally given to me when I was little. I never paid much attention to it, until we started "A is For Apple" and I discovered it in a box in the closet and thought it was just the story for the kindergarteners.

I have never found another copy for sale. But I keep looking.

I found out why there aren't many copies still around. It seems that the author, whose real name was Helen Colodny Goldfrank, was called to testify during the McCarthy hearings. She declined to answer the questions, citing the fifth amendment and was accused of being a Communist.

She had written many children's books, yet she would not tell the committee that she was an author. She kept repeating that she was just a wife. If you read "Apple Pie For Lewis," there is no hint that there are any political messages. Yet her books were pulled from the shelves of bookstores and libraries. (I keep thinking that her story should be part of a high school unit on the McCarthy era. Forget about kindergarten. There is a bigger story here.) Helen continued to write books, and died at the age of 89 in 2002. She said that her favorite book, which was written in 1965, was "Picasso's World of Children." It was a book for adults. Helen wrote 35 books, and claimed that the McCarthy hearing forever affected her

career as an author.

Someday, I'll find another copy of "Apple Pie For Lewis." And maybe my copy will go in an acid-free box and be preserved for posterity. In the meantime, each time I read the story to the kindergarteners, I remind myself that, there is a much bigger story

that they will never know about.

It is said that there is nothing more American than apple pie. Knowing about Helen Goldfrank, and her book, "Apple Pie For Lewis," I think there is truth to that statement. It is part of our American common core.



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